

# Berlin Satire Makes Kapital of Marx

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BERLIN — It would seem hard enough to get a laugh out of Karl Marx, especially in East Berlin, where the ruling Communist party has tended to treat its ideological forbear as an unyielding Germanic god.

But Günther Rucker, a young East German playwright has. His vehicle is "Der Herr Schmidt," a satire on the first political trial of Communists, which took place in Cologne in 1852 on the orders of King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia.

The play has been packing-in audiences at the Deutsches Theater since its premiere early in February.

Mr. Rucker subtitled his piece, "A German Spectacle With Police and Music," and, indeed, the fumbling of Prussian police spies and their agent-provocateurs—a German version of the Keystone Kops—provide some of the play's funniest scenes. Their antics are underlined by an oompah-oompah score composed by Siegfried Matthius. A satirical drawing of Marx as a kind of Sun King accompanies the program.

The dominant figure of the piece, though never seen nor heard on stage, Marx was at that time a political exile in London.

In more or less documentary fashion, Mr. Rucker recounts how the infantile Prussian monarch conspires to brand Marx a wicked revolutionary and get him and his accomplices extradited from London.

Friedrich Wilhelm selects a sycophantic civil servant, Wilhelm Stieber, to carry out his plan. Stieber had gained his attention by helping to put down the revolt of Silesian weavers a few years before, during which he "interrogated two front teeth" out of a striker.

Stieber begins his anti-Marx operation with a preposterous collection of agents, including an amnestied master forger named Hirsch. They travel to London to spy on "the Marx party," with Stieber posing under the unlikely alias Herr Schmidt.

## 'Never Make Professor'

The fun-poking Marx begins in London after Hirsch penetrates the Communist inner circle. He reports to Stieber that Marx has "a boil on his butt," sitting too long in the British



Sketch accompanying program of "Der Herr Schmidt." From left: Wilhelm Stieber, sycophantic civil servant; King Wilhelm IV; King Wilhelm II; Adolf Hitler, and Franz Josef Strauss, West German Defense Minister. Karl Marx is depicted as sun. Line below group, says, "Stieber's Pack, Down to the Present." Satire being presented in East Berlin.

Museum." Interrogated on whether he has learned about any revolutionary plots, Hirsch says that Marx is a "German philosopher who will never make professor, and if that isn't enough to drive a German intellectual to the barricades, nothing will." But he has no plot to report, and not even the "secret protocol of the Marx party" discloses anything incriminating.

Disappointed, Stieber takes his team of conspirators back to Berlin and then turns up in Paris with a new scheme. Recasting the forger Hirsch as Cherval (both names mean stag), he arrests him as a Marxist plotter and drags him to Cologne for trial to turn "state's evidence."

Mr. Rucker's play is based on historical record and on Marx's own "Revelations Concerning the Communist Trial at Cologne."

But unlike his mentor, Mr. Rucker aims for the laughs, and on the way he takes daring digs at Walter Ulbricht's German Democratic Republic: the current Socialist Realist mania for painting portraits, and the dialect of Mr. Ulbricht's native Saxony.